

As an employee of a Video Relay Service (VRS) provider, I have the great fortune of assisting deaf individuals to communicate by videophone in American Sign Language using VRS. I have seen first-hand that this life-altering broadband service is a vital link that connects deaf people to the hearing community.

Ensuring that deaf individuals have access to VRS and encouraging improvements in VRS should be a high priority for you as Chairman and Commissioners of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires the FCC to make available to all deaf individuals nationwide functionally-equivalent communications.

You will soon determine the future of VRS. When you set the VRS rate, you will determine whether America makes progress toward the statutory goals of functional equivalence, nationwide access and inclusion or force deaf users to revert to TTY communications. And, you will determine whether VRS fulfills its potential to drive broadband adoption by the deaf, even in the face of poverty and isolation.

I was deeply disturbed to see the Commissions recent Public Notice on VRS rates. These proposals would put an end to VRS as we know it. My employer has already informed me that if these proposed rates are adopted, our company would head into bankruptcy. This would be disastrous for deaf VRS users.

The FCC should be increasing the availability and use of VRS, not cutting back. You should adopt a rate that encourages continuing improvements in VRS technology and continues to improve services levels. Recent developments in VRS are a good example of how the service can be improved, such as enhanced 911 services, 10-digit numbering, a larger and better-trained pool of interpreters and better videophones with an array of enhanced features. Monthly payments for broadband are a prohibitive expense for many deaf people, and instead of trying to cut back on VRS, you should be exploring ways to make VRS over broadband more affordable to deaf individuals.

Progress towards functional equivalence will be destroyed if the FCC does not encourage VRS providers to improve VRS and make it more widely available. VRS is a recent and dramatic advancement that benefits those who are deaf, but so much more can be done. It would be tragic if the FCC were to destroy this broadband service that is so vital to the deaf.

Recent reports of fraud in the VRS industry are disturbing to employees who work for a company that has operated within current FCC guidelines and has worked to maintain the integrity of the VRS fund. The FCC must devote more of its time and energy to focusing on the elimination of fraud.

I urge you to establish a fair and predictable rate for VRS that will encourage VRS providers to invest in improving VRS and reaching more deaf individuals. The law requires it and it is the right thing to

do.

The FCC proposes a low interim VRS rate. A better option would be a multi-year VRS rate, which would allow VRS providers to continue to invest in their offerings for the deaf. The FCC proposes a low interim VRS rate. A better option would be a multi-year VRS rate, which would allow VRS providers to continue to invest in their offerings for the deaf. As a trilingual interpreter I have seen how the deaf and hearing consumers have benefited from this service. Having that open communication between them after so many years of silence has been a remarkable milestone for them. There are not many trilingual interpreters who can provide the quality of service we do. There have been many times when the deaf consumer thanks me from the bottom of their heart for the best quality of trilingual interpreting they received. Of course that makes me want to improve my skills even more so I can provide the highest quality of interpreting for them. There is so much out there in the world of VRS which I think would be a good idea in case you have not seen how much dedication we give our deaf and hearing consumers. If you were to sit next to us and see how we do our job that would explain how vital the VRS is to both the deaf and hearing. I have been working for Sorenson as a part-time trilingual interpreter for three years plus I have a full-time job. I work seven days a week because I enjoy what I do to provide access communication to the deaf and hearing consumers. Yes, I admit it is a lot of work and I do not get a day off but that does not bother me because I love what I do, I have the skills to provide the customer service and I do this because I like to see when the deaf and hearing consumers are happy that finally after so many years they are able to communicate. If only you knew how important this is for them to finally be able to communicate with one another via VRS. Sometimes there is crying because they missed that connection for many years. It is heartbreaking to see that but at the same time a happy ending to know that they are able to re-connect in life itself. I hope you reconsider the change of rate because it will affect not only the nation but the Deaf world that have been oppressed for many years since the 1800.

Sincerely,

Adriana D. Garcia
Trilingual Interpreter